

Oral Testimony
January 20, 2026

Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the committee on Health and Human Services.

My name is Cheryl Dunbar, I live in Otisfield, and I have been a DSP for 20 plus years working in a variety of residential and work place settings. I currently help people with brain injuries. Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony in favor of LD 1932.

I grew up with a brother 2 years younger than myself, was diagnosed with Down syndrome.

I started my career as a DSP back in the early 90s. It is not a position a lot of people want. You have the good and bad days, and days where your family members can be heard pacing the floors in anticipation who will be working with them that day. The anxiety if a staff will show up or not. We are working with living beings 24/7 in a homes that are state funded.

Working as a DSP has its rewards and downfalls. The major downfalls are staff retention, especially in settings where there are people living with challenging behaviors.

I am here today to advocate for the DSPs that continue to show up. There are fewer of us these days, I have worked through times when there has not been enough staff on shift to attend to all the needs. These shortages cause emotional mayhem to people of our community, and possibly to some of your family members who depend on us to be present.

This wage increase is important to those like me that want to make a difference in the lives of people with disabilities, but we, ourselves struggle to live day to day. I have personally known good DSPs who have gone to other jobs, even stocking shelves in a grocery store, earning more money than direct care workers. The wages of direct care workers need to be livable.

In an 8 hour shift, we help with everyday living tasks, from assisting with brushing their teeth to preparing weekly meals. We are there when their world is falling apart, and committed to their safety. As DSP we do not always feel safe, and have to be equipped to handle verbal, and sometimes physical, attacks. This truly comes from a place where their personal needs are not being met. Though we try our best to provide support and comfort, it is hard when good staff leave to find better paying jobs.

Everyone deserves to live well and not worry for the basic need of feeling safe in a place they call home. I want them to have the best life possible. Right now and for many years, our community members are barely living in a world that makes them feel safe, wanted or validated. A good DSP can change that. If I could show you a list of DSP responsibilities, most would ask why we put up with or take on so much that is why we are here today. We know their fears what makes them happy. We are there on the holidays, away from our own families, making it as festive as we can. Our participants are the ones that suffer the most when there is inconsistent staffing, or, staff that leave for a better paycheck.

If we, as a union, do not truly look at this situation from the eyes are our participants and how this affects their lives, they will forever be in a flight or fight state of mind. I would not want that for my brother and I know you wouldn't want that for your family member.

This is why I am in support of LD 1932.

Sincerely

Cheryl Dunbar DSP, CRMA